

# The Ultimate Guide to **Sales Presentations**

Spring 2010



# The Ultimate Guide to Sales Presentations

The typical sales presentation is **too long**, contains **too much text**, leaves key messages until **too late** in the presentation, talks **too much about the product** and not enough about the benefits, and looks amateurish.



Sales presentations are used at the **moment of truth** right at the end of the sales cycle. An effective sales presentation will deliver **higher conversion rates**

**A dull sales presentation means all the effort required to generate and nurture a lead has been wasted.**

***There is a science to creating effective sales presentations.***

The optimum duration, structure, visuals, and even messages have all been tested and refined by experts. Yet, because it is so easy to open PowerPoint and type, many companies take a DIY approach to sales presentations that seriously undermines sales efforts.

Creating an effective sales presentation is within reach for anybody prepared to invest enough time and effort. We hope that you find these tips useful. ▶▶

- ▶ 1. Preparation
- 2. Message
- 3. Structure
- 4. Visual Aids
- 5. Delivery



# 1. Preparation

The process of preparing for a presentation should not begin at editing text on old slides, and end by quickly reading them through while sat in reception. A truly effective presentation should be well thought-out and rehearsed.

**Most presenters seriously underestimate the time needed to prepare for a presentation.** understand the priorities of those you are meeting.

Editing slides en route is not sufficient. Even if you're on a tight deadline, take time out to consider your message; tailor your presentation to your audience; and practise.

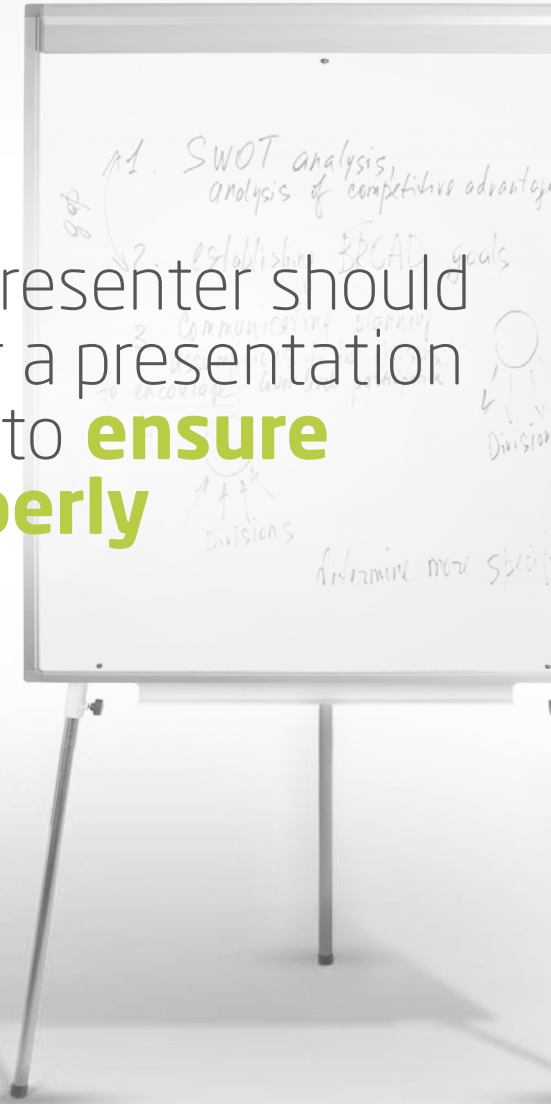
The best way to write a presentation is away from the computer. The best presentations are written by brainstorming onto paper to work out what arguments to use. **Slides should be sketched out before PowerPoint is even opened.** This helps to avoid the haphazard deck that is typically created when considering messages, structure, and design simultaneously.

The one thing every presenter should do when preparing for a presentation is really take the time to **ensure that it is done properly**

Research your prospect. Decision-makers don't want to spend valuable time telling you the basics of their business, particularly if these are clearly stated on the company website. Find out as much as you can about the company's situation and strategy. Use social networks and supporters within the prospect's company to

computer. The best presentations are written by brainstorming onto paper to work out what arguments to use. **Slides should be sketched out before PowerPoint is even opened.** This helps to avoid the haphazard deck that is typically created when considering messages, structure, and design simultaneously.

The less time you have to present, the more time you need to prepare. A really good twenty-minute sales presentation, developed



from scratch, should take twenty hours to prepare. Don't have twenty hours? Involve colleagues or outside support.

The one thing every presenter should do when preparing for a presentation is really take the time to ensure that it is done properly. Planning, designing and rehearsal are all important, and sufficient time should be dedicated to each.



# 2. Message

A persuasive message is the most important part of a sales presentation. A beautiful presentation that says the wrong things won't lead to a sale.

**It is important to set clear objectives for your presentation.** **Presenters should think in benefits, not features.**

What do the audience think now, and what do you want them to think after the presentation? What is the audience doing now, and what do you want them to do after the presentation?

Think about where the presentation fits into the sales cycle – not all sales presentations should aim to get an order immediately, and even if yours does, break this down into smaller steps.

Show that you understand your audience and their problems. Then show that you can deliver solutions to your audience's problems.

A quick summary of the problems that you are able to solve works wonders at the start of a presentation.

Remember the objective: **sell, don't explain.** A little explanation may be necessary for comprehension and justification, but avoid going into heavy detail unless requested.

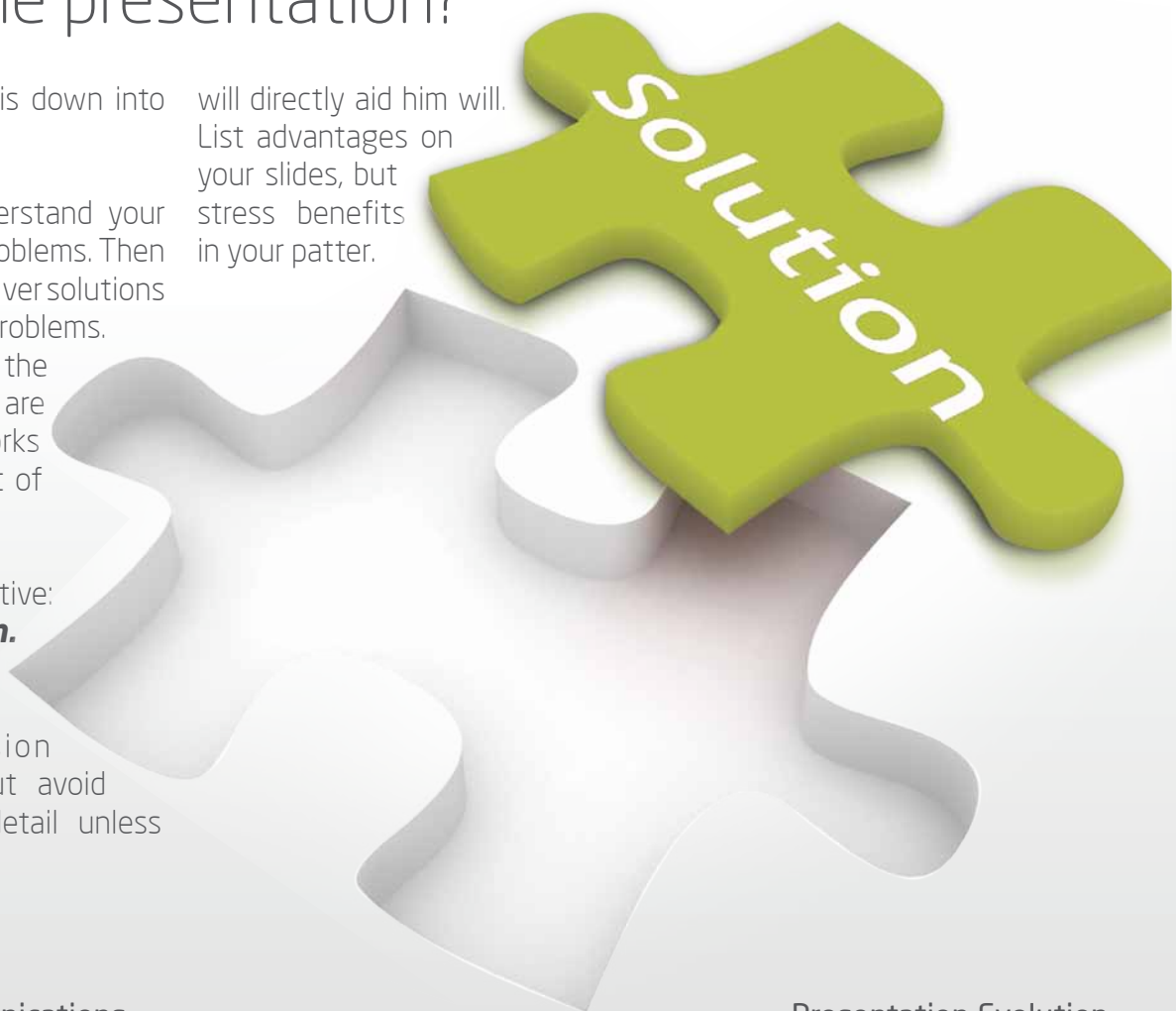
Remember the old adage – nobody wants a ¼ inch drill bit – they want a ¼ inch hole. Listing product specifications will not make a sale, but explaining to your prospect how these features

will directly aid him will. List advantages on your slides, but stress benefits in your patter.

Is your audience deciding whether to buy, or which one to buy? Are you selling the category, or your own product within the category? Many sales presentations need to do both – this is best done sequentially.

## It is important to set clear objectives for your presentation.

### What do the audience think now, and what do you want them to think after the presentation?



The most important question to answer when writing a sales presentation is Why? Why should the prospect buy one of these?

**long.** Five items is optimal, too few benefits and the risk of not hitting the mark increases.

changing them could be the most effective thing you do. Try to shape the way buyers evaluate competing products and you stand a better chance of success.

## The most important question to answer when writing a sales presentation is **Why?**

Why should the prospect buy it from me and not my competitor? What benefits might you deliver to your potential customers? Which of these do they most care about? Which of these can you provide more successfully than competitors?

Don't be afraid to change the audience's thinking. People come in with certain preconceptions;

Be sure to **justify each point you make.** Take each benefit that you claim to offer and explain how your company can deliver on this point. Case studies, testimonials, independent reviews, and explanations of process are all good ways to solidify your claims. Many presenters are reluctant to directly highlight competitors'

Presenters often write a presentation about what they think should be said, without really taking the time to consider **what the audience wants and needs.**

Your answer to the question Why Us? can be thought of as your value proposition. **Don't**

**get carried away by making your value proposition too**

flaws, but there are subtle ways to allude to competitor weakness. If you don't want to directly mention your competitors by name, you can use ghosting - allude to the risk of not having that feature, and present your own strengths in that area.

Above all, a presenter must listen to his audience. Presenters often write a presentation about what they think should be said,

without really taking the time to consider what the audience wants and needs.

**Client Testimonial**

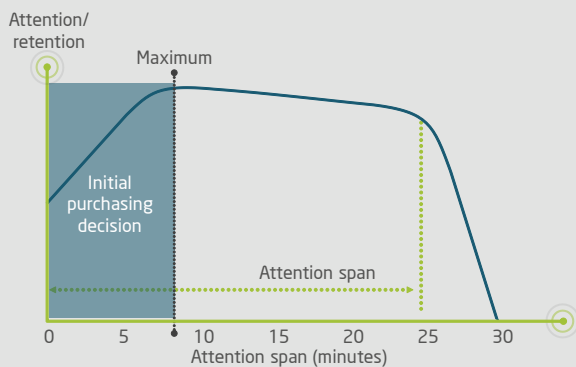
“Since receiving the new presentation I have presented 3 times on very large contracts and won each one ... Each time I present I feel like a god and know I’m going to blow the competition away!”

**Mark Wallace,**  
Senior Operating Executive,  
Kingdom Security Ltd



# 3. Structure

Structuring your presentation effectively can have a significant effect on audience engagement and recall rates. Most sales presentations are too long, leave the audience guessing where they are up to, and leave benefits until the end. Deliver a short presentation, with a clear structure based around the benefits you offer for maximum impact.



**Don't start with your most important slide, as many audience members take a while to focus and might miss it.**

Present your value proposition after 3-5 minutes, when attention levels are at their highest. Don't

Repetition means that your value proposition is remembered.

Mystery can be used to engage your audience. Present your audience with a problem, and give them time to think of a possible solution before revealing the answer. **The brain automatically hunts for solutions to puzzles**, and they will be eager to hear the explanation.

Don't worry about the number of slides you have. Slides vary in the volume of data

Attention spans vary, depending on a range of factors from room temperature to relevance of content, but the average attention

leave your most important points to the end – the typical summary slide that introduces benefits for

## The average attention span for audience members in a sales presentation is little more than **twenty minutes**

span for audience members in a sales presentation is little more than twenty minutes. For best results, **presenters should structure their presentations around attention span**, to ensure that the audience are fully engaged and experience maximum recall.

Audiences spend the first few minutes deciding whether or not they think you are worth listening to. Use the start to build credibility for the rest of your presentation.

the first time when the audience have all stopped listening is a sure way to fail.

Audience members rely on the presenter to remind them where they are up to in a presentation - they have no way of checking for themselves. So, agenda slides are vitally important. Use the benefits of the value proposition as your agenda, and repeat the agenda slide each time a new benefit is introduced. Effect?



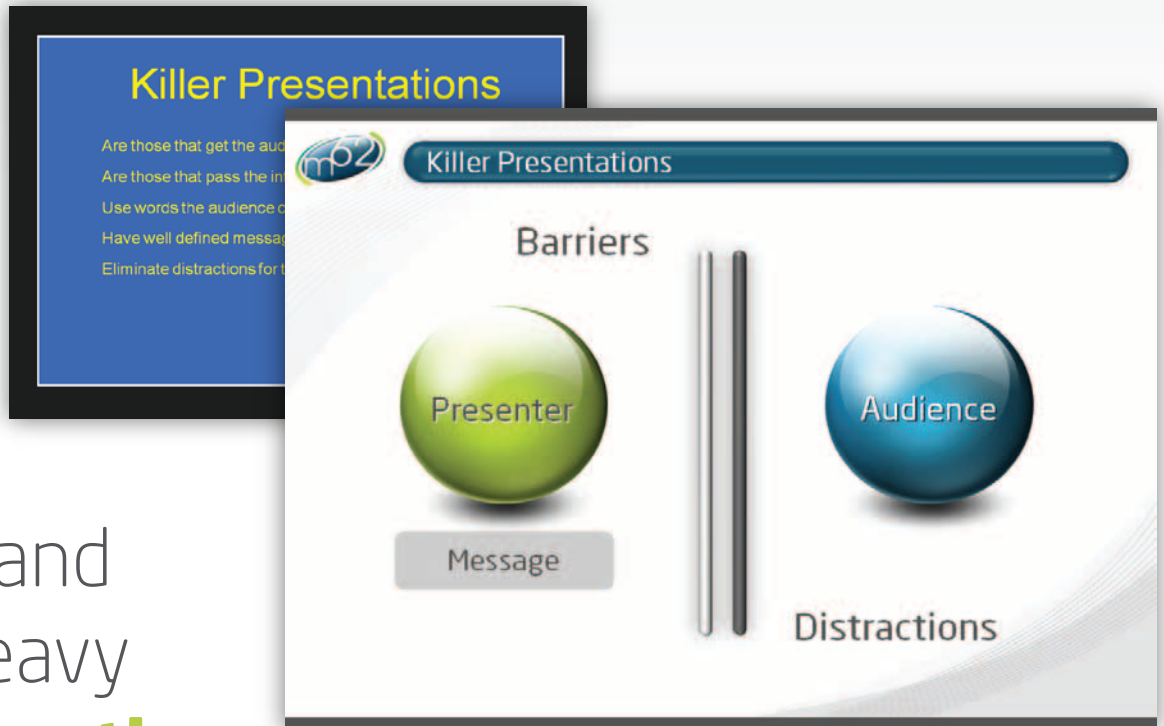
they hold, and different slides take different lengths to present. Time and attention span are important, not slide count.

Presentations don't have to be linear. Use hyperlinks and allow your audience to set the agenda.

# 4. Visual Aids

Effective visual aids can be your most powerful tool in a presentation. When used correctly, they can more than double audience recall rates. However, not all visual aids are effective, and it is important to really think about what you use to support your message

Bullet points and text-heavy slides are the least effective form of visual aids. Using bullet points invites your audience to read and listen at the



## Bullet points and text-heavy slides are **the least effective form of visual aids**

same time - something the brain cannot do. Instead, the audience will read silently and **ignore the presenter.**

Presenters should ensure that their slides do not make sense on

their own. This negates the role of the presenter and can cause the audience to disengage. As a rule of thumb, if you can email your presentation to somebody who missed it, and they can read through and understand it on

their own, then your visual aids are undermining you rather than supporting you.



# If you can email your presentation to somebody who missed it, and they can read through and understand it on their own, then **your visual aids are undermining you rather than supporting you**

The way to improve visual aids is not to replace each set of bullet points with a stock photo. Decorative images might look nice but will not help you to explain your arguments, and will not aid recall. Instead **charts, diagrams, graphs, and animations should be used** to visually

communicate each point made.

Use Visual Cognitive Dissonance to aid audience engagement. To utilise this, put up a visual that is incomplete – and that doesn't make sense without explanation. Your audience will instinctively search for the solution to this

puzzle – for which they will have to listen to the presenter.

PowerPoint isn't the only tool for producing visual aids, although it works well in a lot of settings. Use whiteboards, props, photographs, or whatever else might help.

Visual aids should be tools to communication, not decoration. Using less text is a great step in the right direction, but using decorative images will not dramatically improve the audience's understanding. **Take steps to ensure that your visuals are not just prettier, but more effective.**

## 5. Delivery



Delivery is often the aspect of presenting that is most focused on by trainers and presenters alike. But remember that improving your delivery will not help too much if you have a really bad presentation.

### Don't forget to close

If you keep changing your slides right up to the last minute, you won't know your content. The only way to really prepare for a presentation is to go over it several times. **Practice by actually speaking out loud;** don't presume that going over slides silently will help in the same way.

# Having the prospect consider working with you is **a step towards the sale.**

Don't read from a script – this sounds stilted, inhuman and boring. While speaking off the cuff may not mean that the presenter is word perfect, the result will be much more persuasive. Avoid speaking in the first person. Using "we" demonstrates a focus on the self and your own company. Referring to each point using "you" instead shows that you are really focused on your prospect, and further stresses the benefits. Rather than, "we can simplify the process and reduce costs", say instead: "This will simplify the process for you, reducing your costs."

The use of positive verbs such as "will" is also an easy way to promote trust in your audience. Avoid 'weak' words such as "could" and "should". **Using a more confident vocabulary enables the presenter to be more persuasive**, and puts the audience in a positive, trusting mindset.

Questions should be seen as an opportunity, not an attack. Link every answer you give back to one of the benefits in your value proposition. Be confident and positive; negativity and defensiveness will not help you here. Instead shows that you are really focused on your prospect, and further stresses the benefits.

Ultimately - remember your audience. Everything you say should be focused directly on them, and your entire demeanour should be focused on persuading them.

Don't forget to close. Ask for the order. Even just asking the question gets your prospect thinking. If you can't ask for the order, seek agreement to advance the sale in whatever way is possible. Having the prospect consider working with you is a step towards the sale.



# Conclusion

Preparing a presentation can be daunting, but there is help out there. If you take home nothing else, remember: your presentation is about **what the audience wants**, not

an effective sales presentation depends on your average deal size, the lifetime value of a new customer, the size of your sales force, and the number of presentations your sales

a professionally-created sales presentation can generate extremely rapid return on investment. It isn't uncommon for an effective new sales presentation to bring a **30% increase in close rates**, but this sort of result will only be achieved by working with a presentation agency that can do more than just make your existing slides look a bit nicer.

A tiny increase in close rates from using a professionally created sales presentation can **generate extremely rapid return on investment**

what you want; find your **value proposition** and use this to structure your presentation; and **bullet points don't work** – so use visuals instead.

force delivers. For larger companies chasing big deals, even a tiny increase in close rates from using

As technology advances, more and more presenters are turning to professionals for help with their presentations.

The logic of spending money on



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